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ABSTRACT

This booklet, designed to accompany a videotape, gives teachers and students advice on how to participate in their community and productively build upon it. Teachers who are affiliated with the REACH (Rural Education Alliance for Collaborative Humanities) advise other teachers to design their own program based on the specific community's needs. Characteristics of the programs are: student experiences, students recognition of roles in their communities, student research of communities, cooperating students and teachers working to implement programs in the communities, and students developing positive attitudes toward their communities. The most important goal of each program is that teachers find ways for students to believe in themselves and the programs in which they are involved. Contains 13 references. (JAG)

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Building Bridges: What It Takes

by Pat Bradley; And Others

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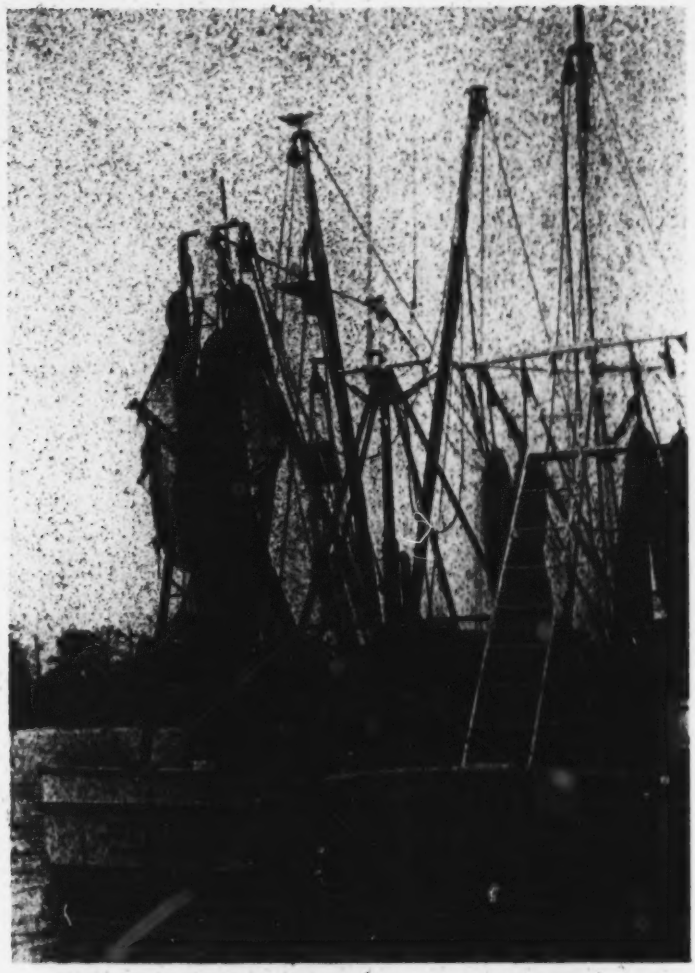
BUILDING BRIDGES:

What It Takes

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

By
Dr. Gail Matthews-DeNatale,
Pat Bradley, and
Debbie Long



Shrimp trawlers docked near Georgetown's Fish House. Programs like REACH help students become more aware of their surroundings.

Thanks to Dr. Betty Belanus, Dr. Doug DeNatale, Deanna Kerrigan, Dr. Elspeth Stuckey, Terrence Sullivan, and Beulah White for their help and criticism.

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IDENTIFY YOUR BELIEFS: HOW SHOULD SCHOOLS RELATE TO COMMUNITY?

The process is the thing, the process and the "why."

—Pat Geiger, Georgetown School District Coordinator

Knowing *why* we do things is often as important as knowing *what* we are doing. It is crucial for teachers to articulate their beliefs about the kind of relationship that should exist between schools and local communities.

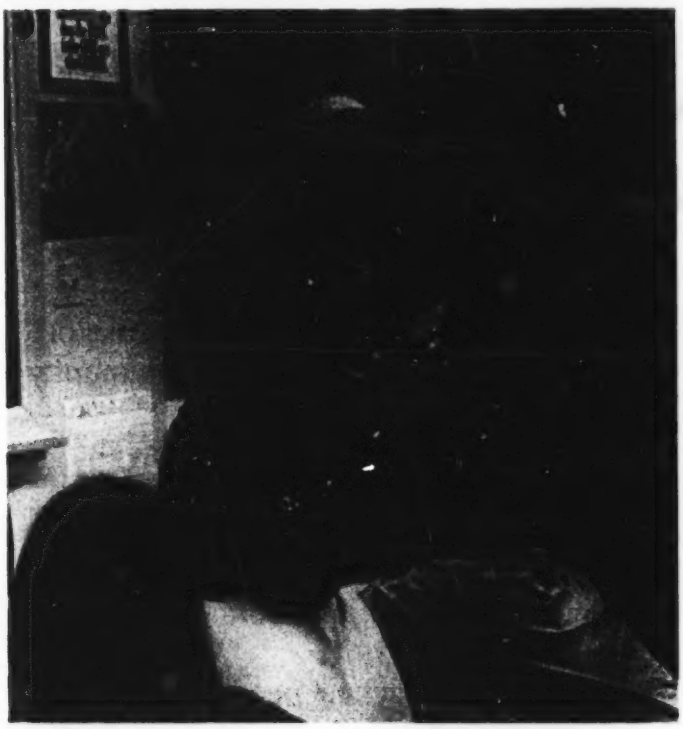
If you are working as a group, team members will need to discuss and compare their perspectives. Work together to author a list of common "beliefs" *before* you begin to develop specific projects or activities.

Beck's REACH teachers base all their project development on this set of core educational beliefs:

1. Students need to experience a sense of themselves as part of a larger community that has a varied heritage.
2. Students need to recognize and analyze their roles within the community.
3. Students need to implement a wide range of research methods, gathering comprehensive information about their community.
4. Students and teachers need to work together to plan and implement comprehensive ways to involve the community in the learning process.

5. Students need to recognize and appreciate that everyone in the community has something to contribute to the learning experience.
6. Students need to evaluate the attitudes of the school toward the community and the attitudes of the community toward the school.

Developing a list of personal and group beliefs will help you clarify the reasons why you want to develop new kinds of educational experiences for your students.



Henry Smith, retired longshoreman and singer, talks to a class about Georgetown's heritage.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU DEVELOP YOUR PROGRAM

I could tell you what REACH is at our school, but it's going to be different in every setting. It's going to have some of the same elements no matter where you are—but your community, your students, your individual teaching style is going to make it different.
—Pat Bradley, Teacher

REACH teachers urge others to custom design their educational programs according to the unique needs and cultural perspectives of their local communities. The implementation of REACH-like programs will vary from classroom to classroom and from year to year. As you are designing your program, you will want to keep the following questions in mind:

****How will we manage our communication and interaction with the community?** Who will be in charge of contacting community members to schedule interviews and visits—a curriculum specialist, teacher, or parent volunteer? You may need to request an extra planning period for one or more of your group members.

****What/who are our community resources?** Don't limit your vision to high profile community leaders—others may have valuable information about local heritage, occupational lore, etc. It is important to get

as many perspectives as possible; everyone has a unique set of information and experiences to share.

"How can we make our list of community resources as inclusive as possible? You may want to informally survey your school staff and students, identifying names and resources that you normally would overlook. (See Bartis and Matthews/Patterson, listed in the bibliography, for survey topics and sample questions.)

"What ethical considerations are implicit in our program? In working closely with your students and their stories, you might encounter topics that are sensitive—traditions that other students may find odd, family problems, and racial discrimination. Discuss possible responses with your team members, using their advice and your best judgement to deal with these situations sensitively.

Remember that you will need release forms for all formal publications of student work. You may want interviewees to fill out release forms that explain how their interviews will be used. (See Bartis for sample forms.)

"What kind of planning time and lead time do we need to implement a successful program? An extra planning period and/or several release days will be

important for making contacts with the community and working with your group. Lead time is very important! Brainstorm ideas, plan, and think program details through months in advance—you won't regret it.

Student Janet Rhue interviews classmate Angel Pyatt for her "life stories" project.

TRANSLATING BELIEFS INTO ACTION: MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

To incorporate my beliefs into the curriculum I do have to use certain tangible items. If I want a child to have a better understanding of himself in the community, then I'm going to search for some type of strategy that's going to make him feel better about himself in the community.

—Debbie Long, Teacher

Here are several projects that Beck Middle School developed to address their concerns about school and community:

"Calendar Publication—"Recipes, Remedies, and Remembrances:" At the beginning of the year students do pre-activities that encourage them to reflect on their lives and the lifeways of their families. For example, students may do a "Peaks and Valleys" exercise, drawing time lines of the high and low points in their lives (See Rief). They may discuss childrens' books that deal with "family" or "community" themes. The teacher may also share his or her own writings about family heritage.

These activities help students identify potential writing topics. The students then gather information from their families and write a series of reflective essays that include family recipes, remedies, and remembrances.

Students use these writings to create a

personal calendar, setting each month's piece in a border that they design out of construction paper. After completing their personal calendars, students submit several writings for possible inclusion in the published school calendar. Teachers choose at least one piece of writing for each student.

These writings are entered into a computer and the text is taken to a local printer. This calendar is published in the late fall.

****Staff Publications—"Stitched With Love:"** Each year school employees—including clerical, maintenance, and cafeteria workers—are asked to contribute a piece of writing or a recipe for a publication. In this way the whole staff participates as a community of writers. Employees say that their contributions to the staff publication have made them "less invisible" to the students. After reading staff writings, students see all school employees as human individuals. They also appreciate the fact that the staff writes along with them.

****Interviews—"Life Stories:"** Students are trained in the art of interviewing: learning how to ask open-ended questions, developing question lists, and taking meticulous interview fieldnotes (See bibliography, sections 1 & 2, for books on interviewing). They practice several different kinds of interviews, including one-on-one interviews and group press conferences.

They begin by interviewing a classmate, translating interview notes into a "life story" essay. Then they practice interviewing their teacher. As they become increasingly competent interviewers, the students interview family members and others in the community. Throughout the year, students conduct community interviews as a means for researching information about other cultures, occupational lore, and topics covered in their ongoing curricula.

****Drama—"Reflections, Mirrors of Our Town:"** The teachers in the school select an aspect of community life that they want their classes to investigate. For example, math classes might research distinctive regional architectural styles, using math to render drawings of local buildings to scale. Physical Education and Music classes may want to research local dance and music traditions.

The students take this research and improvise skits that are about community culture and heritage. The best of these skits are then written up by the students, rehearsed, and performed for the community in the spring.

STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSMENT

The question often arises, "How do we grade innovative work?" Most REACH classes keep student portfolios. During the year students add pieces to their files that reflect their development as writers. Many students become very proud of their portfolios, personalizing the covers with drawings. Teachers and students periodically review the files, and assessment is often done in consultation with the student. (For more about using portfolios, see Rief's book.)

Some REACH teachers administer pre-unit and post-unit surveys or questionnaires to assess the impact of a unit on student understanding.

It is important to assess the effect of the entire program. Interviews with students, teachers, parents, staff, district personnel, and the general community provide valuable insights about program strengths and weaknesses. These talks will also help you assess how your program is being received by the larger community.

LESSONS LEARNED DURING ROAD TESTING: HANDY TIPS

These kinds of projects involve LOTS of work. Beck's REACH teachers offer these suggestions:

** **Peer Work and Student Responsibility—Sanity Savers:** You and your students will get more out of the experience if you let your students manage their own portfolios, help with peer editing, and enter copy into the computer. Beck's REACH teachers set up routines and develop in-class schedules for students to collaborate with each other.

** **Don't Be Too Specific In Your Student Essay Prompts:** All students have access to wonderful lore in their family and community, but that lore will differ from student to student. If your writing prompts are too specific, you will unnecessarily limit their work—not every student will have a great "home remedy" or "vacation story." Instead of relying on prompts, develop general activities that help the students reflect on their lives, community, and family heritage. These activities help students think of their own topics for research, fieldwork, and writing (see Rief).

** **Share Your Own Work, Stories and Traditions:** It sends a powerful message to

your students when you write stories about your own lore and share these stories with your classes. Allow them to read and critique your work along with the writings of the rest of the class. Share your lore and the reasons why you are interested in looking at your cultural heritage.

** **When Documenting Cultural Heritage, Begin In The Recent Past:** Your sense of time and heritage will probably be very different from that of your students. For them "the olden days" may refer to the 1970s. Instead of asking them to begin by interviewing 80-year-old people, first help them explore the heritage of the recent past, working their way back. They will appreciate their grandparents' stories more if they understand the interim lifeways of peers, teachers, parents, and other "younger" community members.

** **Let Students Pick:** Students sometimes write about traditions that they may not feel comfortable sharing with the whole class or with the general public. Traditions often arise from necessity—a topic or custom that you think is very interesting may be in some way shameful for a student. Develop projects that have multiple levels of sharing (e.g., first students write essays for you, then share their work with the class, and finally enter their work in a school publication). At each progressively public level of sharing, ask the

student to select the pieces they want to be considered.

**** Ask Students To Pick Several Pieces:** Younger students may feel closer to their personal stories than to the stories of other community or family members. When selecting writings for publication, ask them to pick out several pieces that represent the range of their work. This will help them reflect on what they have learned and include writing that is not about themselves.

**** Collaborate:** Local culture projects work best if you join forces with several other teachers. Your group should meet regularly to brainstorm possibilities, plan, share thoughts about program successes and weaknesses, discuss possible revisions, and provide "moral support" for each other. These collaborative teacher groups often become close communities, meeting informally outside school to share meals or coffee.

Try to get a range of personality types, subject specializations, and cultural backgrounds represented in this group. The Language Arts teacher may assist the rest with ideas for helping students become better writers, while the Social Studies teacher may come up with great ideas for helping students analyze their interviews. Your program will work "across the curriculum" to accomplish many learning goals.

** **Cumulative Effects:** These kinds of programs require a long term commitment of several years to reach fruition. Hang in there and don't expect to see results overnight!

Programs that highlight local culture gain momentum from year to year. When you repeat community lore projects, older siblings pass on enthusiasm to their brothers and sisters. Each year builds on past years, building a substantial accumulation of community documentation.

After three to five years, teachers find that their students are writing longer pieces and beginning to apply their interviewing/local documentation skills in other classes.

Good projects are contagious—teachers in other classes will see the success of this approach and develop complementary projects that draw on community resources.

Parents Ron and Delores Hollenbaugh share their thoughts during an assessment interview.

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Charlena Franklin, contributor to Beck's staff publication, makes biscuits for the students.

REACH

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Collaborative Humanities
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1993